DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 222 043 FL 013 208

AUTHOR Winer, Lise
TITLE Trini Talk: Learning an English Creole as a Second Language.
PUB DATE 82
NOTE 31p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; *Creoles; *Discourse Analysis; *Language Attitudes; *Language Processing; Language Research; Learning Processes; North American English; Psycholinguistics; *Second Language Learning; *Sociocultural Patterns; Sociolinguistics
IDENTIFIERS *Trinidad and Tobago

ABSTRACT

A case study in second language learning was conducted by the researcher on herself in a specific sociolinguistic context, Trinidad, and with reference to a specific first and second language relationship, standard English and Trinidadian English Creole. The study attempted to: (1) demonstrate the complexity of social, cultural, psychological, and linguistic factors in a second language learning situation from a learner's point of view; (2) identify specific sociolinguistic and linguistic strategies used by the learner; and (3) demonstrate some characteristics of language learning in a Creole/standard situation. The interplay of social, cultural, and psychological factors, how these are expressed in language, and how they affect the learning situation are illustrated by examples of a teasing ritual and inquiries about bush medicine. The examples of actual sociolinguistic and linguistic strategies are determined by the situation and by analysis of apparent communication difficulties after the fact. The strategies and examples are given in a teaching/learning framework: presentation/elicitation, practice, comprehension, and feedback/correction. In each case, the strategies are specific to Trinidad Creole and the more or less negative attitudes toward it among Trinidadians. An analysis of the conventions of taking taxis in Trinidad is presented as an integrative example of many of the strategies and difficulties discussed. (AMH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Lise Winer
Lise Winer
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED222043

FL013208

TRINI TALK: Learning an English Creole as a Second Language

INTRODUCTION

Research in second language acquisition in recent years has focused on the learner, both on the psychological, social and cultural factors which affect this process, and on specific linguistic strategies which learners employ. In the first, or "sociolinguistic", category, studies particularly relevant to this paper include: studies of social distance (Schumann, 1975, 1976) and intercultural communication (Smith and Luce, 1979); the "good language learner" studies (Brown, 1977; Cathcart et al., 1979; Naiman et al., 1978; Wesche, 1977) in which language proficiency is correlated with cognitive learning styles; and the "language learner diaries" (Bailey, 1980; Jones, 1977; Rivers, 1979; Schumann, 1980; Schumann and Schumann, 1977) in which learners keep a record of their affective states while learning a language.

In the second, "linguistic", category, error analysis studies have examined learner output and attempted to classify errors and to infer the rules governing various stages of learner interlanguage (Slinker, 1974), and thus to infer the possible reasons for errors made by the learner (Courchene, 1980; Richards, 1974; review in Winer, 1982). A few studies (Cohen and Aphek, 1981; Cohen and Hosenfeld, 1981; Cohen and Olshtain, 1981; Cohen and Robbins, 1976; Schlue, 1977; Schachter et al., 1976) have asked learners to review their output and introspect on the reasons why they made particular errors.

This paper attempts to combine these two general components of language learning analysis. This will be done as a case study of an individual learner, the author (a native speaker of some varieties of North American English), in a specific sociolinguistic context, Trinidad, with a

specific L1-L2 relationship, a standard international language--English--and a lexically related creole language--Trinidadian English Creole (TEC). The purpose of the paper is threefold: 1) to demonstrate the complexity of sociolinguistic and linguistic factors from a learner's point of view; 2) to identify particular sociolinguistic and linguistic strategies used by the language learner; and 3) to demonstrate some particular characteristics of language learning in a creole/standard situation.

The case study presented here is unusual in two respects. First, because of the relatively low prestige in which TEC is held by both native and non-native speakers (Carrington, 1979: 8-10), very few non-natives learn it (Lawton, 1964). Most studies of language learning in creole situations have focused on the acquisition of an international standard language by a creole speaker (e.g., Bailey, 1963; Carrington and Borely, 1977; Craig, 1976, 1978a, 1978b). Second, as the learner subject was also trained in linguistic techniques, a very high degree of subjective but non-inferential insight into and analysis of language learning processes could be obtained.

THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC CONTEXT

The use of language as a means of communicating--giving or receiving information in the most obvious sense--is also embedded in the context of a series of culturally based assumptions. In what follows, this context will be made overt when helpful to the analysis of specific incidents of language use. A number of examples of language use by the learner are analyzed in terms of the linguistic strategies required to produce, comprehend, and correct language use, that is, an extended and concrete examination of hypothesis testing.

As diaries and studies have shown repeatedly, general techniques such as experimenting with language, developing language information into an ordered

system, constantly searching for meaning, and increasing opportunities for practice (see Stern, 1975, for a typical list) appear to facilitate language learning. It was not surprising, then, that I found the quickest way to social acceptance and linguistic competence was to participate actively in normal local activities: natural history field trips, gardening, cooking, dance lessons, cleaning cow-pens, liming (informal, semi-ritualized conversation), shopping in the market. Not only did these activities offer good language learning opportunities, they were sources of cultural interaction models and also provided information on a number of subjects at once. In addition, placing myself in a position of subordinate learner to local experts in some cases helped to neutralize some negative feelings of resentment or suspicion about my perceived social advantages (i.e., white, foreign, middle-class, English-speaking).

The interplay of social, cultural and psychological factors, and how they are expressed in language can be seen in the following two examples.

Fatigue. This is a semi-ritualized, sometimes severe form of teasing. Anything, particularly potentially sensitive areas such as size (weight) or sexual competence, is fair game. For a white male Canadian acquaintance to remark, "Gosh, you're fat" would be unusual, rude and always uncomplimentary. A normal reaction might be a cold stare or tears. However, "Oh God yuh tick (fat), girl" is a different story. No matter one's reaction, or the complimentary or uncomplimentary nature of the intention, the appropriate cultural response is generally laughter, continuing the "joke" on oneself, or giving back more: thus, "Is only more of me to love", or "Yuh find you is man enough to love alluh this?" (Another socially normal reaction to fatigue is anger backed up by violence, but this would probably have been inadvisable in my case!)

Bush Medicine. Depending on the sensitivity of the topic, all cultures have ways of avoidance. I found that, in general, a principle obtained in learning

about Trinidadian culture and language that explanations in many areas are not readily given unless the learner (outsider) can demonstrate some prior knowledge of the area. A typical example is bush medicine, an extensive system of folk herbal medicine. A scholarly, distanced approach to getting information, such as "What is this plant for?", or "What do you take for a cold?" may elicit some information, from some people, but then again you may be told that "Nobody eh do so much of that again" (negative, anymore). It is much more productive to say, "All yuh could gi me some shandilé --I find I coughin plenty in the night" (Could you give me some shandilé leaf, I'm coughing a lot at night). This usually elicits a very positive response, perhaps "Buh how you know about shandilé !" or "This girl could really talk Trini!" The difference, of course, is that the second type of request places the speaker unequivocally in a position of identification with the culture, and a personal acceptance of its rules and practices, showing respect and breaking down social barriers.

Attitudes of Native Speakers toward the Language Learner

Some language learners have reported feeling that the speakers of the target language regarded them as inferior, and generally incapable of understanding the culture or properly speaking the language (Jones, 1977). Many others have reported that target language speakers are pleased that someone is making an attempt to learn their language. A feature of the TEC situation is that because of TEC's relatively low prestige and apparent similarity to English, most foreigners do not learn TEC beyond a few "fun" words like calypso, or play mass (a type of song; wearing a costume during carnival). Many Trinidadians found it difficult to believe that I actually wanted to learn TEC, or even tried to discourage me.

The (non)acceptance of my learning TEC by Trinidadians appeared to be affected by the class and status of my interlocutor, although in every group there were exceptions. Many of the more educated or upwardly mobile elements

of Trinidadian society are linguistically insecure (Winford, 1972, 1976). They often deny that Creole elements in their own speech are not English. This occurs in many varieties of TEC, from the mention of licenin (licensing, as for vehicles) in an otherwise English parliamentary speech, or a derogation of people in a certain village as really talking "bad English": "Dey does say 'di man-dem', not 'di man an dem'" (both forms mean 'the men', the former being more conservative). People sometimes resented my trying to learn something which they themselves were trying to avoid, or took my speaking TEC as implying that they could not understand English. The many schoolteachers with whom I had contact during my research generally fell into two groups: defensive, disinterested or hostile; or interested, concerned, and helpful. Only with the latter group did my speaking TEC appear to decrease social distance, and then only when I made it clear that I was not attempting to sabotage efforts to teach standard English.

The intellectual/nationalist group was generally initially suspicious, but eventually very supportive. Why did I want to talk to people? What was I going to write about Trinidad? Was I there simply to do research and publish it elsewhere? Was I a "revolutionary with a return ticket", or a post-Rousseau romantic? Thus, I had to convince this group of my bona fides; sometimes I never did. The fact that I was getting my degree from the indigenous university often helped.

The "peasantry" and working class seemed least disturbed by my attempts to learn Creole, and were the most accepting in general, as long as they knew whose friend I was. They seemed to find my speaking either English or Creole reasonable, and speaking Creole sometimes brough favourable comment.

LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

As my primary language learning motivations were integrative and the

situation informal, the selection and ordering of language to be learned was determined mostly by situation or by post hoc analysis of apparent communication difficulties. The following sections consider ways in which I found and elicited language, and established the working principles of learning my "curriculum". The sections generally follow a typical language teaching/learning framework: presentation/elicitation, practice, comprehension, and feedback/correction. Integrated examples, including sociolinguistic and linguistic factors, are given for phonology and a complex situation (taking taxis).

Elicitation/Presentation

In a classroom situation, the learner is presented, for better or worse, with language to be learned. In some way, whether by structural grading by the teacher or materials developer, or by communicative priorities from the students' side, presentation of language is limited. In informal language situtions, selection of items for isolated study may be made by native speakers or by the learner. Meaningful communication is generally the highest priority in informal language learning (Terrell, 1977), but since English is widely understood in Trinidad, I had little need to learn TEC, except for my research (Winer, 1982). As many learners have pointed out, developing full receptive and productive competence requires exposure to and participation in as many different situations and with as many different speakers as possible (Nida, 1950). Given a limited amount of time, some situations and groups proved most informative: family settings, the market, calypso tents, taxis. It is possible to "eavesdrop" on many of these conversations without being too obvious. Lozanov has maintained (1979) that letting language "wash" over you can do much to facilitate internalization of language patterns. In my experience this was particularly true of intonation and social interaction patterns (see below). When eavesdropping in public, I found it difficult to make written notes, as this sometimes attracted hostile attention. On the other hand, with friends, people would sometimes stop

a conversation and tell me to make a note of a word they considered "a real Trini word", or would tell me to go ahead and write--"I could see yuh hand itchin!"

Written Sources. Very little written description of TEC exists. Borely (1973) has outlined the general grammatical system, and other information was found in studies of specific areas (e.g., Bryan, 1974; Dass, 1975; Pyne-Timothy, 1976; Richards, 1970). Some word lists (Ottley, 1971) were available. The best written sources were novels--the only source of TEC apart from conversations with friends that I had before going to stay in Trinidad. Not only is information gained about culture, geography, and history, but language is presented in context, and variation is clearly evident. However, one backlash effect of the positive "nationalistic" attitude toward TEC (Carrington, 1979) has been the publication of some works of fiction written in a style that is neither English nor Creole. Thus, written sources such as novels cannot be used in isolation or as infallible guides.

Training Teachers. As mentioned above, many people denied Creole elements in their own speech. In reference to a particular word, they may claim it is jargon or technical vocabulary, or British English, or that it is only slangs (slang) and therefore not serious. This latter argument was applied not only to truly ephemeral or casual words, but to words of longstanding usage, such as jukkin board (washboard) and grammatical patterns such as It doesn't be on all the time (It isn't on all the time). In such cases, the persistent language learner can either attempt to change the TEC-speaker's perceptions of the language, or simply listen carefully and check possible acceptable forms with other speakers. It should be noted that a very positive attitude was generally maintained by all Trinidadians towards words valued for their expressiveness, e.g., basodee (light-headed, giddy, lost one's head) or words

pertaining to local phenomena, e.g., jump up (kind of carnival dance), unless such phenomena were regarded as "backward", e.g., dance cocoa (to remove pulp from cocoa seeds by dancing on them).

Most native speakers cannot readily analyze and articulate rules of grammar for their native language; however, TEC speakers often further maintained that rules did not exist at all in "dialect", that you could simply "break" the English rules any way you wanted. Thus, I first had to prove that TEC had rules that could be induced by native speakers. For example, I found both "he mus be eh go" and "he eh mus be go" for "he must not have gone". This was used as proof that the language had no rules. But when I tried an arrangement parallel to the English word order, i.e., "he mus eh be go", it was firmly rejected, showing that rules did exist within variation.[1]

One common result of requesting an explanation of a TEC word was being given another TEC word, e.g., "janjat is like komess" (confusion, trouble), or "maljo is bad-eye" (evil eye). Sometimes the TEC speaker may not know that the definition words are also only TEC and no more comprehensible, or may not know the English equivalent, if there is one. Also, another TEC word may seem closer in meaning and feeling than anything in English. To understand suck salt (to be having great difficulties), I went through synonyms catch yuh nenen and catch yuh tail before I finally convinced my teacher that I really didn't understand, by giving a situation (winning a lottery) that was so obviously off that I was finally given a situational example (a person has no money, just lost his job).

While asking people direct questions about personal, social, or cultural aspects of Trinidadian life was not often productive, either because they were considered macocious (nosy) or because of an understandable difficulty in articulating specific answers to vague questions, asking about particular real objects or very specific events (e.g., What is this called? How do you cook it? Whose house is that? Does it bite?) can elicit not only the

names of things but a host of related commentary. This can have a chain effect. Having read the word crook in a book on cocoa planting, I asked a friend about it. He explained that it was a kind of wooden saddle with crosspieces front and back from which baskets could be hung, and that it was almost extinct. Two days later I saw one as I passed in a taxi; had I not been alerted beforehand I might not even have noted the object.

Although asking questions about things I already knew--a technique I had found useful in French for learning to understand directions--was sometimes helpful, I found it necessary to establish a certain post-tourist level of knowledge and competence or I would end up being told something very elementary only. On the other hand, too familiar knowledge and native-like behaviour could result in not having things explained, precipitating minor disasters, and being judged by native standards, something I wasn't always ready for.

As Schumann (1975: 214) has pointed out, at a certain point in the language learning process, the learner needs a "small community of sympathetic people who will help him in the difficult period when he is a linguistic and cultural child-adult". In my case, the cultural brokers who fulfilled this role were those interested in my work, those who liked me, or both, and who through personal empathy or experience could see my point of view and explain what was happening in particular situations. This community for me was composed almost equally of Trinidadians and foreigners, the latter usually other West Indians, and not the North American expatriate community, whose lifestyles and mine were generally quite different, e.g., in housing, communication and transportation.

Practice

I found myself very reluctant to admit that I didn't understand something in case people thought I was a tourist and possibly tried to cheat me, or in case they changed up (modified) their speech to English. This was good for linguistic exposure, but sometimes led to misunderstandings.

Listening in a specific situation and then copying speech--a real imitation drill and role play combined--was useful, as long as I imitated language appropriate to my age and sex. The market was especially good for practice. Having had little success one morning with "How much are the yams a pound?" (see feedback section below), I stationed myself near some other yams (being too embarrassed to ask the same vendor) and heard people ask:

What a pong (fuh di yam)?

How di yam goin?

How much a pong yuh yam/fuh di yam?

Of course I did not distinguish all these variations at once. I caught one, and then tried it to see if it worked. Repetition/reinforcement occurred in other places--"What a yard di cotton?"-and I could even ask without buying anything.

Wesche (1977) has noted the value of conversing aloud or internally to oneself. I found this especially helpful in intonation, where for all my "field independence" (Naiman et al., 1978), I found it difficult to listen and analyze simultaneously. Instead, I appeared to unconsciously register the entire effect as a whole, and then practice specific language bits against the still unconscious "template". Once I thought I had a pattern, I could then listen for it or try it out. And, after years of hating audio-lingual drills, I found repetitious drill, in addition to role play, suddenly attractive. What a pong di yam, What a pong di breadfruit, What a pong di ___...

Recognition/Comprehension

Given the deceptive similarity between TEC and English, questions arise in the recognition of lexical differences, and ways in which words are interpreted. Speakers of both languages tend not to perceive that some problems of communication

involve real (socio)linguistic differences, instead attributing problems to rudeness or ridicule (Di Pietro, 1976).

There are three general categories of TEC words, excluding those identical to English: 1) those words which are recognizably "foreign" to English speakers, and which are generally uninterpretable; 2) those words which are recognizably different but which can be at least partially interpreted in context; and 3) those words which are not recognized as having a different meaning.

Some TEC words were instantly recognizable as non-English words--either I'd never heard them before, or they didn't "sound" like English. Items like dance cocoa and pitch lake (asphalt deposit) sounded like English words, but the combinations were unfamiliar. Words like komess, bunbun (slightly burned food, especially rice, at bottom of pot), malkadie (epilepsy), and manicou (oppossum) sounded foreign. I could sometimes gain a very general idea of meaning from context; in "he sufferin with malkadie", the collocation indicates that malkadie is probably a disease. (The problems involved in translation of such words by native speakers were discussed above.)

In certain cases, the second category, non-comprehension of an item was noted, and comprehension delayed until I actually saw the real thing. For example, from a fictional context, I knew the expression "when the cane in arrow" referred to a particular time of the year, and had something to do with the sugarcane cycle. On my first trip to Trinidad, in December, I noticed the typical grassy arrow-shaped flower plumes on the sugarcanes, which settled the word and the time of year; the season is also distinguished by being a low-work period for sugarcane workers, just before the harvest.

Context was particularly helpful with words which could be easily perceived as grammatic or semantic extensions of English words. This included a number of differences in parts of speech, and verbs which are transitive in English and

used "intransitively" in TEC (Winford, 1972: 97-98): "He dead Monday and he bury Wednesday" (was buried); "This food eatin nice" (tastes); "Gi me a borrow" (loan); "I have to cobweb this room" (remove the cobwebs from); "It must be have a dead dey" (corpse); "Lef it dey to ripe" (ripen); "I di wukkin an I di tiredin" (I was working and getting tired). Forms which looked like English forms and which have more or less the same meaning, but have slightly different collocations or inflections also presented little difficulty in comprehension: e.g., to make cold (to be cold, of weather). However, words and phrases complicated by syntactic (plus lexical) differences were more difficult:

TEC	ENG
They makin baby.	They are having sex/making love.
She makin baby.	She is pregnant.
She make a baby.	She had a baby.

A common pattern of semantic extension is the inclusion of several words in one language in one word form of the other (Hancock, 1977). For example, the TEC word vex is used, with great frequency, for a range of English words, e.g., vex, annoy, angry, upset, mad, ticked off, pissed off. The word nasty, in its meaning of 'filthy' or 'dirty' has the same general meaning in TEC as in British English, but is applied to many more situations; it is not used in its common North American meaning of 'spiteful' or 'unpleasant', or 'serious'. (This word presented little problem of comprehension for me, but was confusing to TEC speakers if I used it in my native sense.) Pelt is English is generally used for heavy rain, a barrage of stones, or running away quickly. The latter two are used in TEC, but the word is generally used in the sense of "throw" or "to knock down by throwing at", e.g., "If you see how they peltin bottle at the Oval", "Dey pelt all di mango", "pelt a kiss" (blow). Similarly, although

occasionally used in the sense of "to touch with the tongue", or to describe an overwhelming victory, it is more commonly found as follows:

TEC	ENG
Yuh go get licks.	You'll get a licking/beating.
The fence lick dong.	The fence was knocked down.
He lick out the window.	He broke the window.
The car real lick up.	The car was really smashed up.

A more complicated problem of determining word domain arose when word forms overlap between the two languages and there is not a one-to-one correspondence in any particular situation. The following example is an extended description of the process of domain definition by a series of overgeneralizations and hypothesis-testing (Richard, 1974). The problem word is banana. In Ottley's word list (1971), fig is glossed as 'banana', a common equivalent given by Trinidadians, as in "Here we call a banana a fig". To me, figs were small round Ficus fruits. I first met the TEC fig in a Canadian class in West Indian literature; in the short story "The Fig Tree and the Villager" (Henry, 1960) the misunderstood word led to a host of misapplied Biblical interpretations.

The first consideration is physical environment: North Americans are generally familiar with a very limited variety of sweet bananas. However, the Caribbean includes a large variety of Musa fruits, both sweet and non-sweet. In Trinidad, there are three words which apply to this entire domain: fig, banana and plantain.

Since plantain and fig seemed always to be cooked before eating, my first trial definition resulted in: banana = yellow when eaten, eaten raw, vs. fig or plantain = green when eaten, eaten cooked. A green fig I simply considered a redundancy. Then plantain became distinguishable by its larger size and angular

shape, leaving only a colour/cooking distinction between fig and banana. This became inadequate in the face of ripe plantain or ripe fig, yellow when eaten, eaten cooked. A more refined and simplified classification based simply on banana = eaten raw vs. fig/plantain = eaten cooked, had to be revised to account for sikiyé fig, which is undeniably yellow, eaten raw. A further problem was Toco banana, which is usually green when eaten, eaten cooked, but which can also be eaten when yellowish-green and raw. Some kinds of fruits are usually referred to by an individual name, e.g., moko, and referred to en masse as fig . The only two varieties I found consistently and commonly referred to as bananas were the Gros Michel and Lacatan varieties, both of which are large, yellow when edible, eaten raw, and exported. A still-remaining anomaly in this scheme is the fire or buck banana, a dark red fruit usually fed raw to livestock.[2]

In the final category of lexical comprehension are form counterparts, words which appear identical in form in TEC and English but which have a different function or meaning (see similar examples from Jamaica in Pollard, 1978: 2). Differences in meaning are almost never immediately obvious, even in context. Thus misunderstandings often resulted from the incorrect assumption of both speakers that we were using the same word in the same way.

In certain contexts, it was difficult or impossible to note the difference in these form counterparts:

TEC Example	Meaning	
	TEC	ENG
That child miserable.	badly behaved	unhappy
He did it for himself.	by himself	for his own benefit
I nave tea arready.	breakfast	afternoon tea
He hurt he foot.	foot or leg	foot

This food need spice.	cinnamon	seasoning, flavouring
If the tree eh bearing, put salt.	fertilizer	salt (sodium chloride)
The melon now in flower.	has flower buds	is blooming

This problem also occurred with grammatical features. In the sentence "He does go dey", whereas English does would indicate emphasis, TEC does indicates habitual action. TEC had (possibly a calque of an older bin) as in "I had come here one time" (I was here once) indicates not the English anteriority to an explicit reference point, but the TEC anteriority of long past time.

It was only sometimes that comprehension problems became evident, particularly in the third category, and sometimes not until long after the initial exchange. This process is dealt with in the following sections on feedback.

Feedback

In a typical language class, positive or negative reactions, whether verbal or non-verbal, usually come from the teacher, or from an internal "monitor" (Krashen, 1977). In some cases, I was corrected by my TEC teachers, but by and large realized I had made an error because of immediate or delayed feedback which indicated non-comprehension.

Immediate Feedback. A physical response of non-comprehension was sometimes a reaction to my utterance. Since the puzzled facial expression was kinesically and semantically the same as English, I had no trouble recognizing it, as in the following example (the silent pause is also indicative of a problem):

L (author): Is this the Hawks Club?

TRIN : (puzzled expression)

L: Is this where the Hawks are?

TRIN: (more puzzled expression)

L: The fete?

TRIN: Yes, the Hawks fete here.

Although I understood that there was a communication problem here, I could not identify it at first, thinking it might be a lexical/grammatical problem, and adding where for clarification of intent. I then abandoned the entire sentence and introduced a new idea--the fete. However, it was not until the doorman said /hawks/ that I realized I had said /haks/, the probable source of phonological difficulty.

Modelling by native speakers occurred when they were not certain what I was trying to say and provided a model of what was understood to be my utterance, with rising question intonation:

L: What is this called?↓

TRIN: How yuh call it?↑

L: How yuh call it?↓

TRIN: Breadfruit.

Laughter is a frequent occurrence in language learning situations, as a native speaker (or sometimes learner) response to an unintentionally funny learner utterance. Positive or delighted laughter as feedback can indicate that the learner has used a word correctly or even made a real joke in the target language. One problem I had, for example, was that people made assumptions about my lifestyle based on rumour or generalization--that I was white, English speaking, Canadian and middle class led many Trinidadians to assume that I was also wealthy; I must of course have a car, a house, a large salary. None of my declarations to the contrary were believed until I said, "I really scruntin!" (to be struggling, scraping along financially). This invariably produced at least a smile, not only because of the force of the word

in this situation, but because a foreigner had used it, appropriately.

Although laughter was an infrequent reaction to inadvertently incorrect or ambiguous language use on my part, it was very common (as has been my experience in French) when the utterance could be construed as a double entendre. I could easily avoid English/TEC shared taboo words such as pussy or cock, but had more difficulty with idiomatic expressions. For example, ENG 'Give me a break' was in TEC 'Give me a chance' (TEC break can mean 'orgasm'); ENG 'I'm hot' (weather) was unequivocally 'sexually excited' in TEC, and I quickly learned "It makin hot" (weather).

Ridicule is a form of feedback that certainly occurs in language classes, although attempts are usually made to suppress it on humanitarian grounds. Some cultures place high value on politeness, even in the face of foreigners' faux pas. But much anecdotal evidence reports ridicule when, for example, men use female speech patterns, or when learners of English as a second language fail to produce θ and ð ; both these cases involve using speech forms of a different, usually lower status group. In learning TEC, the most consistent ridicule I was subjected to came from problems with /a/, /ae/, /aw/ and /ɔ/. Trinidadians generally look down on small islanders (people from the smaller Caribbeans islands, such as Grenada or St. Vincent) as being less educated and from less important countries. The archetypal small islander is a Grenadian, and the shibboleth of pronunciation box, which Trinidadians pronounce /bɔks/ and Grenadians /boks/.[3] My typical Canadian pronunciation of hot, for example, as /hat/ was viewed as closer to /ɑ/ than /ɔ/, and provoked reactions like "/boks boks/! You is a Grenadian or what!" (See below for a similar experience with my pronunciation of /aw/ as /a/.) A less frequent source of ridicule appeared to be the intermittent hostility of some Trinidadians who were

ambivalent about my attempts to learn Creole and/or insecure about their own language usage; they pounced on colloquial English as error , to ridicule my pretensions to expertise.

Immediate dissonance occurred when the interlocutor failed to give a predicted appropriate response, but did not identify a linguistic problem. This happened frequently with form counterparts (see above). For example:

TRIN: That fish smellin fresh?

L: (cleaning fish in kitchen) Oh yes.

TRIN: Then why yuh buy it?

L: (pause) It's good fish!

As I had meant my "Oh yes" to reassure my friend that the fish was perfectly all right, her response brought me up short, and I repeated my reassurance, using a totally new phrase to avoid whatever the problem was. Not until later did I find out that TEC fresh can mean 'smelling rotten, gamy, like a snake, like spoiled fish'.

A similar immediate dissonance occurred in the following instance:

TRIN: That child miserable!

L: Poor thing!

TRIN: How you mean?!

L: Well, if he's unhappy...

TRIN: Is he makin trouble an you feelin sorry for he?
That boy miserable too bad!

At this point I realized that there was a problem centering on miserable and asked what it meant (badly behaved).

A final example of immediate dissonance occurred at the market. The previous week I had seen large cages of parrots near the fish vendors' stalls. In making conversation with one vendor, the following exchange took place:

L: I eh see no parrot today.

TRIN: (pause, then turns to next vendor) Allyuh have /pawa/?

(receives a fish from second vendor)

(to me) How much you want?

L: (pause) Two.

Although I instantly recognized that something was not working, I did not understand at the time why my comment on the non-presence of parrots had netted me two fish. Tasty as they were, I felt this could cause problems in the future if not cleared up. Unlike the first two examples given here, which were later disambiguated on my own, I took this problem to a linguist at the university. We developed the following explanation: pawa is the name of a local fish; given that the vendor understood my parrot as pawa, the rest follows. Parrot in TEC is pronounced /pa' rɔt'/, with equal syllable stress. My pronunciation of parrot as /pa' rɪ?/, with first syllable stress, led my interlocutor to 'not hear' the final unstressed consonant; my /ɪ/ for /ɔ/ led her to note both vowels as /a/, and in a typical, French Creole-influenced pattern, the unstressed intervocalic /r/ became /w/. In the context of the fish stall, these factors led to an interpretation of my utterance as a request for pawa.

Delayed feedback was a particularly interesting phenomenon because of its frequency, in my experience, compared to other language learning situations. In such cases, original non-dissonance had led to a hypothesis considered valid until further information challenged it--sometimes months later. For example, when I read in a novel (Naipaul, 1961) that the protagonist's relatives descended upon him and slept under the house, I simply understood this as an underground basement. My first day in Trinidad presented me with an example of a common Trinidadian house type, built on tall pillars. As I looked at the

parked car, laundry lines and hammocks between the pillars, protected from the rain, I suddenly understood where the people slept.

In another case, I easily understood "I went to a next store" as "I went to the next store", the difference attributed to article usage. However, "Yuh next foot" was immediately dissonant, although occurring much later, as it seemed to apply to centipedes, not people. Since there was only one other possibility, i.e., 'the other foot' (in this case 'leg'), I could interpret next as other and a next as another, retroactively.

Both phonological and lexical confusion can occur in the same case. Passing a small lake near a sugar refinery, I asked what it was, lakes of any kind being rare, and was told, "They used to take water from there for the factory, but now they use it to /main/ fish". I interpreted this as mine, analogous to mining minerals or otherwise taking natural resources from the ground, or water. Some time later, another friend, discussing his plans to start a hatchery, said someone he knew had done it--"He mindin fish". The word was in fact mind, which drops the /d/ unless preceding a vowel. The collocation is still TEC, not ENG, which would use raise.

A particular type of delayed dissonance occurred with behaviour and changes of behaviour I was not consciously aware of. I first realized this only after returning to Canada after a year in Trinidad. The first few times that new acquaintances or even old friends asked me what I was doing now, or what I did (i.e., for a living), I found the questions nosy and inappropriate. In fact, I myself had done the same thing when first in Trinidad and found myself reprimanded for contravening the social convention of never directly asking people their occupation. A second example occurred when at a friend's house. As I was washing the dishes:

CAN: Try not to let the water run too much because the ground is wet and the sump [drainage pit] might not drain.

L: (runs water into bowl to use and turns off faucet)

CAN: (pause) That wasn't a criticism...

My friend thought I was angry because I had not said something like, "Oh, sure, ok", to indicate that I had heard and was not taking the comment as a criticism. My lack of verbal response was interpreted as resentment or anger, which it certainly would have meant a year previously. Only on thinking back and checking with Trinidadian friends in Montreal did it become clear that I had "absorbed" (i.e., learned, "field-dependently") a Trinidadian behaviour pattern, i.e., not responding verbally to a command but simply carrying it out.

Phonology

As mentioned above, Trinidadians were overtly sensitive to certain errors involving my incorrect pronunciation of /ɔ/, /a:/ and /aw/ as /a/. Although I found no great difficulty in producing /aw/, I was reluctant to use it because it is a phoneme highly stigmatized in Montreal for sounding "American".[4] Since /ɔ/ did not exist in my phonemic inventory, and perhaps because of its real and perceived closeness to existing phonemes, I found it difficult to distinguish, and only recognized its existence after the following incident:

L: (in hardware store) Do you have any cooking pots?

TRIN: (pause) You mean like for a stove?

L: (pause) Yeah, you know, to cook food in, pots. (making gesture showing round pot)

TRIN: Over dey.

In this case, my utterance was apparently interpreted as "parts"; the TEC for pots is /pɔts/ and for parts is /pa:ts/. After professional linguistic consultation, I managed to hear the difference between /pat/ and /pɔt/ and drilled it aloud to myself or to watchful native speakers. I still found it difficult to "hear", and replaced /a/ with /ɔ/ only as each word was pointed out to me (e.g., "/bɑks bɑks/!").

The following example shows just how many phonological shifts can be required between English and Creole. The context was a public square at a busy crossroads. I wanted to buy a coconut. I knew the vocabulary, the cost, when to hand over the money, and how to handle drinking from the nut. I carefully planned and rehearsed to myself the necessary six-word utterance: "Gi me one with plenty water". Realizing that water presented some specific problems, I consciously: 1) equalized syllable stress; 2) unflapped the medial /t/; and 3) dropped the final post-vocalic /r/:

L: Gi me one with plenty /wa' ta'/.

TRIN: Yuh want /waw' ta:'/ or /w ' ta'/?!

(about 15 bystanders burst out laughing)

L: (meekly) /waw' ta:'/

Both modelling and ridicule were effective here , if not pleasant.

TAXI TALK: AN INTEGRATED EXAMPLE

The conventions of taking taxis in Trinidad involve physical, social, cultural and geographic elements, as well as kinesics and verbal language. Most taxis follow routes, and are shared by passengers. In towns, taxis to particular destinations generally have fixed ranks, and you first have to learn where to find them. Then you must understand such phrases as "Grande by two." (driver has room for two more passengers to Sangre Grande) and "Arima on the highway" (i.e., not on the Main Road). If you are attempting to stop

a taxi on the road, you can call out the destination, e.g., "St. James?", if the taxi is going slowly enough, or the driver may ask you, "How far yuh reaching?" (how far are you going) when he stops. A few taxis have signs indicating destination, but this visual cue is not usually considered sufficient by passengers. Aside from directly asking the destination, "Arima?", a number of gestures are commonly used by drivers and potential passengers.

If, for example, you are in Port-of-Spain and wish to go along Long Circular Road, bend the left arm up at the elbow, slightly extend forefigner, and twirl hand gently. Gestures are also distance- as well as destination-specific. For example, a repeated downward motion of the hand, forefinger pointing down and arms close to the body is short drop (short distance); an extended arm at slightly less than 90°, pointing downward, indicates a medium distance.

Hypothesis-testing about kinesics follows the same patterns as for verbal communication. Standing outside the university in St. Augustine one day, trying to go west to Port-of-Spain, I noticed a woman ahead of me pointing her left arm, forefinger extended, straight up in the air. Tired for the moment of analysis and induction, I asked her where she was going, and was told "Port-of-Spain". The gesture was therefore a destination-specific signal. Some days later, standing across the street, going east to Arima, I noticed the same gesture used by drivers. Thus it turned out to be a kind of distance signal, i.e., the next large town and transfer point in that direction. Repetition of either type of gesture can be used for emphasis or as an interrogative.

Getting into the taxi requires knowledge of the etiquette of space sharing, the logistics of entry (you can enter on either side of the car if it is parked, but enter or leave only on the curb side when the car is pulling over en route), but most importantly, not slamming the door. (The British and Australian cars common in Trinidad seem to require less force to close their doors than North American and Japanese ones.) In extreme cases of door-slamming,

a driver may call the passenger a "Yankee", or refuse to take the passenger altogether--"Get out mi car, yuh eh go mash it up" (get out of my car, you're not going to wreck it).

Learning the amount of fares is usually best done by asking other passengers, although complicated fare structures are occasionally posted in the car. Fares can also vary depending on whether the taxi is a regular car or a "maxi-taxi" (mini-van), as the latter are supposed to be cheaper. Parallel to not wanting to indicate lack of verbal knowledge, you can always hand the driver a bill certainly larger than the fare, wait for change, and figure it out for the next time. You also have to learn when to pay--generally far enough from your stop that you won't slow down the driver, but close enough so there's no question that you've paid. Full maxi-taxis on certain routes have fares collected by the driver for everyone before the taxi takes off, but new passengers picked up en route after other passengers have left may pay on entry or exit. When paying, the money can simply be handed to the driver or passed by other passengers, or you can address the driver as "Driver", and say, "Hold this" (take this) when handing him the fare.

When it comes time to get out, you may have to know landmarks (e.g., "the Dial", a pillar clock in Arima; the tree in Valencia). "Leave me off at the next corner" was not generally understood, but rather, "The corner yuh comin to, driver". The proper ways to ask to be let off are given in Merchant's (1979) calypso "Taxi Talk", which played up the potential double entendre of taxi talk conventions:

> Driver, I go take it here,
> Driver, gi me over dey.
> Right by the gateway,

I takin it day,

Just by the corner,

Below the flyover.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined step-by-step analyses of language learner experiences, making overt the cultural components of language acts in a specific context. The examples presented here have illuminated the complexity of factors involved in learning linguistic patterns within a particular sociolinguistic matrix. In examining specific techniques of eliciting, comprehending, and practicing language and interpreting a variety of feedback, some processes in second language acquisition have been made explicit and concrete. In addition, the examination of such processes in a creole/related standard situation is important to help elucidate the nature of language learning in relation to language distance, and the specific linguistic and sociolinguistic factors in creole situations.

As both studies and learner diaries have shown, motivation and opportunity count for a great deal in the success of language learning. The variety of learning experiences described here suggests that overemphasis on any one particular cognitive strategy, particularly if derived only from studies of formal learning situations, may be misleading.

All right, I go take it here.

NOTES

[1] Variation also included items marked as more "broken" or more "English", e.g., eh and doh respectively for negation. A desire to reduce social-personal distance would call for using a form as close as I could manage to my interlocutor's usage; a desire to establish distance was indicated by my using a different form, or switching to English. It was therefore necessary to pay attention to socially stigmatized speech forms, whether to avoid or use them.

[2] See also a discussion of domain definition in the Caribbean in Crawford, 1976. It appears that a part of the difficulty in this particular domain is that TEC has incorporated a new word at an uneven rate. In the French Creole of nearby islands, and presumably in Trinidad in the past (French Creole was the dominant popular language there until well into the twentieth century), all such fruits are called fig (Fr. figue Ptg. figo) whether cooked when eaten or not. Fig mi refers to figs ready to be eaten, cooked or not, and fig matuité (TEC full) refers to the stage at which a fig or other fruit can be picked to ripen but cannot yet be eaten. In the older TEC system, it is likely that plantain was already separate, and all other members of the set were figs: green fig if eaten when green, and ripe fig if eaten when yellow, thus including some varieties in both categories.

Into this system was introduced the word banana, meaning a fruit that is yellow and eaten raw; export-orientation may have emphasized large size. That this word has only partially replaced parts of the fig domain is seen in three kinds of intermediate forms: 1) retention, e.g., silk fig, sikiyé fig, and governor fig, all fairly small, eaten raw when yellow; 2) hypercorrection, e.g., *sikiyé banana; and 3) back formation, e.g., green banana, i.e., green fig.

[3] Calypsos and cartoons about immigration officers discovering illegal immigrants (squatters) by making them say box are well known. Trinidad Bill Trotman presented this up-dated version during the 1979 carnival season:

> This immigration officer catch a squatter and he tell him to say "box". The squatter say, "Aha!" Yuh cyan catch me wid dat again!" and he say, "/bɔks/."
>
> The officer say, "Oho! Now I see you is a real Trinidadian, no problem. But now, just tell me three words beginning with the letter 'a'." The squatter say, "That easy--orange, onion, and oil!" (/ɑrɛnj, ɑnyɑn, ɑyɑl/)

[4] Class, and perhaps class/ethnicity, differences in phonology (Winford, 1972) were a factor in my learning TEC. Although I could not speak a really "basilectal" TEC consistently, I did not learn to speak like most educated, upper middle-class or white Trinidadians. For example, my pronunciation of work fell somewhere in between the "broader" /ʌ/ and the more "English" /ɔ:/. I also did not like to drop intervocalic or word-final post-vocalic /r/, as in guitar /gɪtɑ: /, as this sounded British and very affected by my home standards.

REFERENCES

Bailey, B. Teaching of noun-verb concord in primary schools in Jamaica. Caribbean Quarterly, 9, 4 (1963), 10-14.

Bailey, K. An introspective analysis of an individual's language learning experience. In R.C. Scarcella and S.D. Krashen, eds. Research in Second Language Acquisition (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1980), 58-65.

Borely, Clive. A brief outline of Trinidadian vernacular and an indication of areas of interference in the learning of English. The Education Journal of Trinidad and Tobago, 4, 2 (1973), 5-17.

Brown, H. Douglas. Cognitive and affective characteristics of good language learners. In C.A. Henning, ed. Proceedings of the Los Angeles Second Language Research Forum, (Los Angeles; UCLA, 1977), 349-354.

Bryan, T. Avril. French, Spanish and Trinidad English. Americas, 26, 9, (1974), 25-31.

Carrington, Lawrence D. Linguistic conflict in Caribbean education. Paper presented at the International Conference on Psychology of the Child, Paris, July 1-8, 1979.

Carrington, L.D. and C.B. Borely. The Language Arts Syllabus 1975: Comment and Counter Comment. (St. Augustine, Trinidad: University of the West Indies, School of Education, 1977).

Cathcart, R.W., M.A. Strong, and L.W. Fillmore. The social and linguistic behavior of good language learners. In C.A. Yorio, K. Perkins, and J. Schacter, eds. On TESOL '79, (Washington, D.C.: TESOL, 1979), 267-274.

Cohen, Andrew D. and Edna Aphek. Easifying second language learning. Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 3, 2 (1981), 221-236.

Cohen, Andrew D. and Carol Hosenfeld. Some uses of mentalistic data in second language research. Language Learning, 31, 2 (1981), 285-313.

Cohen, Andrew D. and Elite Olshtain. Developing a measure of sociocultural competence: The case of apology. Language Learning, 31, 1 (1981), 113-134.

Cohen, Andrew D. and Margaret Robbins. Toward assessing interlanguage performance: The relationship between selected errors, learners' characteristics and learners' explanations. Language Learning, 26, 1 (1976), 45-66.

Courchêne, Robert. The error analysis hypothesis, the contrastive analysis hypothesis, and the correction of error in the second language classroom. TESL Talk, 11, 2 (1980), 3-13; 11, 3 (1980), 10-29.

Craig, Dennis R. Bidialectal education: Creole and standard in the West Indies. International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 8 (1976), 93-134.

Craig, Dennis R. The sociology of language learning and teaching in a creole language situation. Caribbean Journal of Education, 5, 3 (1978a), 101-116.

Craig, Dennis R. Language education in a post-creole society. In B. Spolsky and R. Cooper, Case Studies in Bilingual Education. (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House Publichsers, 1978b0, 404-426.

Crawford, John R. When is a bluggo not a bluggo? Caribbean Journal of Education, 3, 1 (1976), 66-69.

Dass, Sita. Locative predication in a sample of the speech of 5 to 6 year old children in Trinidad. Caribbean Studies undergraduate thesis, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad, 1975.

De Pietro, Robert. Role enactment and verbal strategies in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Paper presented at the Conference of the Society for Caribbean Linguistics, University of Guyana, Georgetown, Aug. 11-14, 1976.

Hancock, Ian F. Lexical expansion within a closed system. In B. Blount and M. Sanches, eds., Sociocultural Dimensions of Language Change, (New York: Academic Press, 1977), 161-171.

Henry, Roy. The fig-tree and the villager. In Andrew Salkey, ed. West Indian Stories. (London: Faber and Faber, 1960).

Jones, Rebecca A. Social and psychological factors in second language acquisition: A study of an individual. In Carol A. Henning, ed. Proceedings of the Los Angeles Second Language Research Forum, (Los Angeles: UCLA, 1977), 331-341.

Krashen, Stephen. The monitor model for adult second language performance. In M. Burt, H. Dulay and M. Finocchiaro, eds. Viewpoints on English as a Second Language: Trends in Research in Practice. (New York: Regents, 1977), 152-161.

Lawton, David L. Some problems of teaching a creolized language to Peace Corps members. Language Learning, 14, 1 (1964), 11-19.

Lozanov, Georgi. Suggestology and Outlines of Suggestopedy. (trans. M. Hall-Pzharlieva and K. Pashmakova). (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1979).

Merchant (Dennis Williams). Taxi talk. On Dr. Soca. (Port-of-Spain: Kingdom of the Wizards Enterprises, 1979).

Naiman, N., M. Frohlich, H.H. Stern, and A. Todesco. The Good Language Learner. Research in Education Series No. 7. (Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1978).

Naipaul, V.S. A House for Mr. Biswas. (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1961).

Nida, E.A. Learning a Foreign Language: A Handbook for Missionaries. (2nd ed.) (New York: National Council of the Churches of Christ, 1950).

Ottley, C.R. Creole Talk (Trinibagienese) of Trinidad and Tobago; Words, Phrases and Sayings Peculiar to the Country. (Port-of-Spain: Victory Printers, 1971).

Pyne-Timothy, Helen. Relationships between the phonological systems of Trinidad Creole and standard English. In G. Nickel, ed., Proceedings of the Fourth International Congress of Applied Linguistics, vol. 2. (Stuttgart; Hoch Schulverlag, 1976), 175-186.

Richards, Henry. Trinidadian folk usage and Standard English: A contrastive study. Word, 26, 1 (1970), 79-87.

Richards, Jack C., ed. Error Analysis: Perspectives on Second Language Acquisition. (London: Longman, 1974).

Rivers, Wilga M. Learning a sixth language: An adult learner's daily diary. Canadian Modern Language Review, 36, 1 (1979), 67-82.

Schachter, J., A. Tyson, and F. Diffley. Learner intuitions of grammaticality. Language Learning, 26, 1 (1976), 67-76.

Schlue, Karen. An inside view of interlanguage. In C.A. Henning, ed. Proceedings of the Los Angeles Second Language Research Forum. (Los Angeles: UCLA, 1977), 342-348.

Schumann, F. Diary of a language learner: A further analysis. In Robin C. Scarcella and Stephen D. Krashen, eds., Research in Second Language Acquisition. (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1980), 51-57.

Schumann, John H. Affective factors and the problem of age in second language acquisition. Language Learning, 25, 2 (1975), 209-235.

Schumann, John H. Social distance as a factor in second language acquisition. Language Learning, 26 (1976), 135-143.

Schumann, Francine M. and John H. Schumann. Diary of a language learner: An introspective study of second language learning. In H.D. Brown, C.A. Yorio, and R.H. Crymes, eds., ON TESOL '77. (Washington, D.C.: TESOL, 1977), 241-249.

Selinker, Larry. Interlanguage. In J.C. Richards, ed., Error Analysis. (London: Longman, 1974), 31-54.

Smith, Elise C. and Louise Fiber Luce, eds. Toward Internationalism: Readings in Cross-Cultural Communication. (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1979).

Stern, H.H. What can we learn from the good language learner? Canadian Modern Language Review, 31 (1975), 304-318.

Terrell, Tracy D. A natural approach to second language acquisition and learning. Modern Language Journal, 61 (1977), 325-337.

Wesche, Marjorie B. Learning behaviors of successful adult students on intensive language training. In C.A. Henning, ed. Proceedings of the Los Angeles Second Language Research Forum. (Los Angeles: UCLA, 1977), 355-370.

Winer, Lise. An Analysis of the Errors in the Written Compositions of Trinidadian English Creole Speakers. Ph.D. dissertation, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad, 1982.

Winford, Donald. A Sociolinguistic Description of Two Communities in Trinidad. Ph.D. dissertation, University of York, 1972.

Winford, Donald. Teacher attitudes toward language varieties in a creole community. International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 8 (1976), 45-75.